

THE CHRISTIAN THEORY OF SOCIAL HAPPINESS

by John Newton Brown

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"Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said: It is more blessed to give, than to receive."

- Acts 20:35

The rarity and publicity, the solemn and joyful character of this occasion, combine to awaken some unusual expectations in the mind of the assembly. A stranger as I am to most of you, brethren, did I appear here only to court your applause, the consciousness of the increased demand on your part would only increase the difficulty and embarrassment on mine. But this house of God is not a theatre for display. You have come here for another purpose, and so have I. You have come to hear something appropriate to the hallowed design of this Christian assemblage,--something that will do you good,--something that you will be glad to remember when this meeting of our happy family of churches is over, and you are returning to the ordinary business and trials of life. On this ground, brethren, I meet you to-day. On this ground I have something to say to you, and I can speak with the cheerfulness and freedom becoming a minister of Christ. I know that without him we can do nothing; yet I bless him for this opportunity. I wish to set before you, as a body associated for his service and glory, a fundamental principle inculcated by him,--a principle that cannot be too often repeated, nor too strongly enforced, if we would see his cause flourish and prosper throughout the churches, and to the utmost bounds of the inhabited world. If this be, as I trust it is, the supreme desire of your hearts,--for ye are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ--I have only to request you to turn with me to Acts xx:35, and "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give, than to receive."

If we were to judge from the conduct of mankind generally, we should say, either that they have never heard these words, or that they did not believe them. If we select from the mass of mankind even the professed followers of Christ and judge from their ordinary conduct, the best we could think of them, as a body, would be, that though they might have heard or read of this great maxim of their master, they had either been strangely blinded to its meaning, or had as strangely forgotten to make it the rule of their own conduct. Brilliant exceptions, in modern times, as well as in the primitive ages of Christianity, there doubtless are, not only in the higher, but also in the humbler walks of life. But these exceptions, by their very brightness, only serve to throw the great mass of professed Christians into the deeper shade.

I need not, I am sure, detain you a moment in any critical observations on the text. It is a matter of no consequence to inquire when and where the words of the Lord Jesus were uttered, and why they are not expressly recorded by the four Evangelists, in their brief memoirs of our Saviour. It is enough for us that they are here recorded. It is enough for us that they were well known, and proverbial among the primitive Christians,--insomuch that the apostle Paul, in his touching farewell at Miletus, only deemed it necessary solemnly to call them to the remembrance of his brethren. It is enough to perceive that the vital spirit of the words, the great and paramount principle which they inculcate, breathes in every page of our Saviour's history, and warmed every pulse of his affectionate heart.

That principle it seems impossible for any one who reads the words to mistake. It is clear that our Lord meant to be understood as laying down this great and comprehensive maxim,--that social

happiness in consists in doing, rather than in receiving good; that our own happiness is best secured by endeavoring to promote the happiness of others; in other words, that Christian benevolence, as opposed to selfishness, is the only true foundation of both public and private felicity. This is the great principle which I propose to illustrate.

Yet I confess, my brethren, I feel as if it were almost wrong for me, who am so poor a proficient in this lesson of our Lord, to attempt to explain or enforce it upon you. Though, for more than twenty-five years past, I have sought to make it the basis of my social life, yet I feel to-day, before God I deeply feel, that much of my own conduct lays me open to the keen rebuke: Physician heal thyself. But when I reflect how much our ignorance of the vast extent of the principle of the text, combines with our natural sloth and selfishness, to obstruct the progress of the cause of Christ, I feel like the blind and indignant Son of Manoah, when his hands grasped the pillars of Dagon's temple, and he said: Let me die with the Philistines. And when again I reflect what mighty consequences under God, have flowed from rousing the attention of the community to some great principle of social improvement, revealed in the Scriptures, but generally overlooked, I am ready to adopt the prayer of Sampson on that memorable occasion, when he bound himself with all his might, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes,--rather let me say of my own sloth and selfishness, for the blindness which they have brought upon my soul. And did my intellectual bear any proportion to his physical strength, gladly would I put all forth, at any sacrifice, to make you comprehend and feel the truth, the extent, and the personal application of the words of the Lord Jesus, "it is more blessed to give, than to receive".

I affirm then, on the authority of these memorable words that Christian benevolence, as oppose to selfishness, is the only true foundation of public and private happiness. I say Christian benevolence, because no other can be found in our fallen nature, sufficiently comprehensive in its aim, pure in its motive, powerful in its practice, or persevering in pursuit of its ends. The benevolence of mere constitutional impulse, however amiable, is partial, unsteady, unconnected, and inefficient. The benevolence of infidel theorists, however plausible on paper, is practically still inferior, being in fact a disguised and calculating selfishness; as indeed was confessed by Lord Bolingbroke and Jeremy Bentham themselves, the great leaders of the Utilitarian school. But genuine Christian benevolence is utterly opposed to selfishness,--by which last term I wish to be understood, not as intending a subordinate, innocent self-love, but self-love in its unholy excess, usurping the throne of the soul in the place of conscience and of God, and in that proud position directly opposed to Christian benevolence, and to both public and private happiness.

I. Since all things are most vividly and strongly illustrated by contrast, I shall endeavor by that means to make you comprehend, in the clearest manner, the distinction and opposition between these two great principles of action. I know not how I can more forcibly impress you with the wisdom of our Lord, in laying down his great maxim of Christian benevolence, than by asking you first to look for a moment at the consequences which flow, not from adopting, (for alas, it is too congenial to our fallen nature to need adoption,) but from acting upon the opposite principle.

These consequences are all around us. They are within us. Alas, the world is full of them! Sin is but selfishness in its ten thousand forms; and every selfish spirit acts upon a latent maxim the very reverse of that inculcated by the Lord Jesus. This maxim, brought out from its disguises, and put into words, would be: It is more blessed to receive, than to give; or, as the modern phrase is, "keep all you get, and get all you can."

Now for the application of this principle in practice. "Keep all you get;" That is to say, let no one be the better for your strength, talents, or learning,--for your labor, skill, or experience,--for your prayers, property, or influence. Happiness is your being's end, and happiness consists in the free gratification of your favorite desires. If your taste be for good eating and drinking, for fine clothes, houses, furniture or equipage, indulge yourselves, without regard to others, expect to see that you lose nothing by them. Waste nothing upon the wants of the improvident poor, who are only idle, impudent and ungrateful. If your taste be for books, gratify yourself alone. Shut yourself up in your library. Never lend a book, for it will be sure to be injured or lost; never communicate your knowledge, for people always hate to be told the truth. If you care for none of these things and love nothing but money, secure your drawers and chests; see that your securities are good, and your stocks safe; comfort yourself with look over your notes and bonds, your deeds and mortgages, your houses and lands, your silver and gold. Never think of any good your money might do others,--how many destitute sufferers it might relieve,--how many schools it might establish,--how many tracts and other useful books it might procure for the benefit of thousands,--how many evangelists and colporteurs it might send out in our neglected settlements,--how many missionaries it might support among the heathen,--how many Bibles it might translate, print and circulate in the languages of the perishing people, to make them wise unto salvation. No, these are all visionary schemes with which no prudent man will trouble his head. Keep all you get for yourself; and when you must leave it in the course of nature, leave it all to your children, or family connexions,--whether they need it or not,--whether it will be likely to benefit them or ruin them. In a word, you may be a glutton, you may be a book-worm, you may be a miser, only keep all you get.

But the one half of this miserable story is not yet told. The latter part of the maxim of selfishness infinitely exceeds the former. "Get all you can," that is to say: but the sponge of the community. Stick at nothing to get along in the world--drive your business night and day, early and late; allow yourself no pause for prayer, no parenthesis for reflection. Determine to be rich, no matter though thereby you plunge yourself into temptation and a snare, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which, the Bible says, drown men in destruction and perdition; all this is nothing if you can only become independent,--if you can only acquire the character of an industrious, sharp and stirring man, who knows how to do his own work, and drives his own bargains. But you say you cannot dig. Never mind, then beg. Be a drone in the hive of society, and suck honey from every one who is generous enough to feed you. Ask favours and kind offices of all, but render as few as possible in return. "Get all you can." But you say, perhaps, to be you are ashamed. Well then, continues the lying spirit of selfishness, since you must live in some way, and cannot afford to live honestly, get over all scruples of conscience, as you have those of honor,--covet that which is neighbor's, and get all you can. Steal, lie, cheat, swindle; be a forger, a counterfeiter, a highwayman. Or, if you despise being a vulgar villian, be a genteel one. Get into some lucrative office, no matter what, or how; never trouble yourself about discharging its duties beyond what is unavoidable;

neither be scrupulous about accounting for all you receive,--that is the concern of your employers. If ejected at length for abuse of trust, be sure to get all you can. If that be not sufficient, resolve at least to "die game;" gamble, drink, quarrel, kill your man like a hero, or be killed yourself; as to consequences, you have nothing to fear after death,--hell is all a bugbear,--heaven a dream,--death an eternal sleep,--religion superstition,--and of all superstitions, that of the Bible is the worst.

Do you say, hold! This is too horrible. I know it is most horrible. But it is a most horrible reality. All this is but selfishness fully acted out. All this is the natural, and alas, too frequently the actual consequence of the diabolical principle: it is better to receive, than to give. How many thousands has it landed in irreligion, libertinism, atheism? All these forms and more, selfishness assumes; to all these tremendous results it necessarily tends; and however kept under check and restraint by the benignant providence of God, still every desire, every thought, that springs from this odious principle, has essentially the same hateful and abominable character. O how can we expect the church to prosper; how can the world be made happy; how can we hope for the approbation of conscience, the esteem of virtuous beings, or the blessing of a holy God, till we from the heart abjure all the specious and glozing maxims of selfishness, and mourn in brokenness of spirit that the time past of our life has been so much under their accursed and withering dominion.

II. Let us now reverse the scene, and contemplate the operation and effects of Christian benevolence, as enjoined in the words of the Lord Jesus. How bright, how pure, how exhilarating the contrast! A contrast that must forever magnify the power and riches of God's regenerating grace. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works. This change of heart, this radical reformation of the soul, dethroning selfishness, and enthroning the love of God as the ruling disposition there, lays the true and lasting foundation of Christian benevolence. He who becomes a happy giver on Christian principles, is first a happy receiver. Profoundly conscious of this, his love is clothed with humility. Remembering his past condition, his present infirmities, his utter unworthiness in the sight of God, he is prepared to feel the force of the exhortation : Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Yet look at this man, who with sincere, though distant steps, is following the example of the Lord Jesus in going about doing good, and tell me if he has not caught something of the spirit of a purer and better world.

Observe his faith. He takes his position at the foot of the cross. There he beholds Him, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor; that through his poverty we might become rich. There his faith moulds his soul to pity. Observe his gratitude. Hear him saying: What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? Thus his very gratitude turns into prayer. Mark his conscientiousness. I am a steward, he says, of the manifold grace of God, and it is required of stewards that a man be found faithful. His faith, love, humility, gratitude, pity, prayerfulness, conscientiousness, all prepare him to be a worker together with God, in the great work of doing good. His work and his example are before him. Conscious that his opportunity is the only limit of his obligation, he lays himself out to do good unto all men, and especially to the household of faith. His heart set on this great object, and stimulated by the sweet and affecting motives of the gospel, teems spontaneously with desires and plans of Christian usefulness, and his hands toil with delight in the execution of his benevolent purposes. His field of usefulness is wide as the world, and he only regrets that his means are not as extensive as its

miseries. We are not without facts, my brethren, to justify this representation. You, yourselves, in your best moments, have realized what I now speak; it is the experience of some of you which I describe; far as you yet are from the glorious standard of perfection, after which you aspire and press. Let us now trace the beautiful operation of these benevolent principles upon the Christian character, and then see if it is not truly, more blessed to give, than to receive.

Adopting and acting upon this great maxim of Christ, you will set a proper value upon personal industry. You will prize and practice productive labor, both of the body and of the mind, as the means of multiplying the common stock of wealth, wisdom, and happiness; enabling you thus to give to him that needeth, as well as to provide things honest in the sight of all men. Your heart, head, hands, voice, pen, and influence, will be all appropriately and diligently employed. Time will be precious. The day that has been passed without doing any good to others, you will, with far more reason than the emperor Titus, account a lost day. Health will be precious; and for this end you will seek to preserve and invigorate it. Your moments of relaxation from labor, your social enjoyments, your gushes of domestic tenderness and endearment, your play of buoyant wit and brilliant fancy, your very overflowings of innocent and irrepressible mirth, will all be chastened, regulated, sanctified, by continual reference to this end.

You will practice also a wise and generous economy. In order to be liberal to others, you will retrench selfish superfluities. You will aim to merge private in public interest. You will study simplicity, rather than splendor. You will husband valuable resources. You will make a prudent selection of the channels in which the streams of your bounty shall flow out to bless the world. In the use of money, your principle will be, never to decline any obvious call of Providence; but as a faithful steward, to use it so as to do the greatest possible good with the limited means entrusted to your management.

With the same view you will, as much as possible, reduce all your affairs to system. You will study order in your business, and method in your charities. You will remember that God has made everything beautiful in its season, —that there must be a time to gain, as well as a time to give. You will recollect that God is not the author of confusion, but of peace; and that order gives completeness, clearness, dispatch, harmony, and beauty. You will not forget that the great plans of Christian benevolence make up a vast and glorious system; all the parts of which require to be regularly supported, to accomplish their ends of mercy in the salvation of a lost world. You will not forget that an order was given to the apostolic churches, to give an uniform action to their Christian benevolence, — making their sweet sacrifices of love as regular as the return of the Christian Sabbath, and ever increasing their amount in grateful proportion as the Lord in his providence should prosper them. I know no finer example of this in modern times, than the late excellent Nathaniel R. Cobb, of Boston, a member of the Baptist church in Charles street, under the care of Dr. Sharp. With him, this was a matter of solemn covenant with God; and God so prospered his faithful servant, that in the short span of fifteen years' business as a merchant, conducted with the most exemplary integrity and honor, he yearned and gave away (besides an ample provision for his family,) more than \$40,000, to promote the cause of Christ.

Acting upon this great Christian maxim, your mind will become accustomed to self-denial. You cannot advance a step in your generous enterprise, without crucifying sloth and selfishness. This daily

cross you will take up in the strength of Christ, that you may daily follow him. Like Paul, you will learn to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection to your great end. Even your vagrant thoughts will be arrested, and brought into sweet captivity to the work of Christ. Your meat and drink will be to do the will of him who sent you forth on your great errand of usefulness.

I need hardly add that the principles of Christian equity, will, by force of this great maxim, strike their deep roots yet deeper in your soul. You will deeply feel, what so many seem to forget, that to do good to others, you must begin by fully conceding to them the same rights which you claim for yourself, as a man, as a citizen, and as a Christian. To wrong others in the least degree, by the violation of justice or truth, in thought, word, or deed, would defeat your very object. To be generous, you must first be just. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Your mind, by following out this comprehensive maxim, will gradually form the noblest habits of candor and meekness. Habitually seeking to mitigate the miseries and multiply the happiness of all your fellow men, you will despise none below you; you will envy none above you. You will speak evil of no man; you will think evil of no man. Your clear eye, will not, through the blinding beam of prejudice, magnify motes into impassable mountains. It will be as open to virtues as to faults; rejoicing not in iniquity, but rejoicing in the truth. On every excellence of character in others you will dwell with pleasure and thankfulness; every defect that darkens its brightness and disfigures its beauty, you will seek, by sympathizing prayer, and tender fidelity in secret, to remove. And O the rapture of the thought. If he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother! When opposed in your benevolent designs, and even when suffering the greatest provocations of insult and injury, you will remember that charity suffereth long and is kind. You will think of him, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. You will commit your cause to God. You will be superior to the meanness and selfishness of revenge. You will nobly pity and pray for your worst enemies; and win that grandest of all victories, the conquest of evil passions in yourself and others, through the might of the Lamb of God. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

A divine complacency, peace and joy, will thus be shed abroad in your heart. Be it so that you cannot command success in executing the best designs. You still have consolations which are superior to all contingencies; you have the testimony of a good conscience; you have a refuge in prayer; the sweetness of kind affections is still as an oil of gladness in your heart; the Spirit of God beareth witness with your spirit that you are his child. If disappointed in your own attempts, you are yet happy in seeing and hearing of the good done by others. Let the Lord work by whom he will, you can rejoice, and you do rejoice, that the desirable good is done. But embarked, as you are, in the cause of infinite goodness, you cannot always be disappointed in your own exertions. The God of love and peace will be with you. He will bless you and make you a blessing. At his word obstacles unexpectedly give way. Even your temporary trials shall be for your good. Your very failures shall teach you caution. They shall work humility, patience, diligence, prayer. They shall thus bring you nearer to God, and his love shall breathe into your soul new ardor, confidence and hope. Every holy purpose shall be refreshed, and the wisdom profitable to direct, shall be richly bestowed at your request, by him who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.

Thus, almost of necessity, your mind will become active and original. I use these terms in the best sense. The liberality of mere impulse may not be coupled with knowledge; but it is always, and increasingly so, with the liberality of principle. This latter cannot thrive without great efforts of thought, reflection, contrivance. As a great degree of selfishness will make even a fool cunning; so a great degree of benevolence will make a wise man still wiser. It will invent new methods of doing good. It led John Howard to explore, purify, and reform all the prisons of Europe. It impelled Andrew Fuller to invite and persuade the whole Christian world to unite in a monthly concert of prayer for the success of the gospel; William Carey to offer himself as the first English missionary to India, and to execute translations of the Scriptures on a scale unparalleled before in the history of the church; William Fox to propose the first society for the support and universal diffusion of Sunday schools; Joseph Hughes to suggest and organize the first great society for the spread of the Bible throughout the whole world. It moved our own Judson to take that first decisive measure which aroused American Christians of every denomination to the great work of evangelizing the too long neglected heathen; and to give himself the first and brightest example of American missionary self-sacrifice. The spirit of which I speak, will not be satisfied to do no more than others do. It will work not only in public, but in private; not only with others, but if need be alone and in advance. It will not only be steadfast and immovable, but always abounding in the work of the Lord. As the political economist contrives for the advancement of his country; as the public spirited citizen contrives for the improvement of the town; as the affectionate parent contrives for the welfare of his family; so will you, my Christian brother, contrive for the advancement of the cause of Christ. As the merchant exports large quantities of his goods, to secure a richer return; as the farmer sows a portion of his grain in the spring, to reap a richer abundance in autumn; as the enterprising gets subscriptions for canals, rail-roads, and factories, for the sake of gainful investments in the things that perish; so will you search out the best investments for your means of doing good. The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things he shall stand.

And here permit me to observe that the disposition, which in relation to the movements of Christian benevolence, is constantly suspicious of doing too much, and of going too far beyond the measure of our fathers, is a spirit of an ill omen. Such a spirit, my brethren, instead of carrying the church of God forward into the promised brightness of the last days, — when the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun, sevenfold, — would not even raise her up from her present state of darkness and declension. It is not the spirit of Elijah, or John the Baptist, or Paul, or Luther, or Menno, or Roger Williams. It is not the spirit of Christ. It is not the spirit of one who feels that it is more blessed to give, than to receive. It may attempt to hide itself behind the cover of the Bible; but its anti-mission hiss betrays the serpent fang of selfishness. It may array itself in the garb of orthodoxy; but in kicking at the cause of temperance, it reveals the cloven hoof of antinomian heresy. And yet these wretched misguided men glory in the name of "primitive Baptists." Tell it not in Gath! My brethren, how is it possible for a true Baptist, a genuine believer in the primitive doctrine of grace, to cherish a disposition so utterly at war with its whole spirit and tendency? How is it possible, I say, when the whole plan of our redemption, from first to last, from the foundation to the topstone, is one stupendous contrivance of disinterested divine love, — without a precedent and without a parallel!

I know indeed it has sometimes been insinuated from a different quarter, that a belief in our free election of God, and its kindred truths, tends to paralyze the energies of Christian benevolence. Much as we respect the love of these good brethren, we must be permitted to marvel at their logic. As if a cordial belief in the most amazing overflow of mercy in the universe, should tend to shut the heart against the sentiments of mercy! No; rather, as all facts and experience will testify, this very belief is adapted to dissolve all the frost of selfishness within us; and to rouse up every faculty of the soul to that godlike beneficence, which is the best return we can make to God for his transcendent kindness towards us. Such was the doctrine of St. Paul. Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering.

Once more. The full operation of this benevolent principle, will raise you to real greatness in the kingdom of God.

Why does a benevolent and holy enthusiasm kindle at the names of Howard and Hughes, of Fox and Fuller, of Carey and Judson? It is not that their talents were originally so much superior to others, but that they applied them more sacredly to beneficent purposes; that they lived not for themselves, but for the good of others and the glory of Christ. If the secret of their moral greatness were whispered from heaven in our ear, it would be this, — they remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, which you have forgotten: it is more blessed to give, than to receive.

Do I wish then to infuse ambition into the hearts of Christians? Would I have them all aspire to greatness? I would. But the design, you say at once, is altogether visionary — not to say suspicious. Not at all, my brethren, if understood according to the Christian definition of the term. Greatness, in the worldly sense, is doubtless out of the reach of most us, and it is happy for us that it is. Great talents, great fortunes, great intellectual attainments, are the lot of few; great stations, and great celebrity, the lot of fewer still. But is there no greatness except that which is surrounded by the blazonry of this world? Yes, my brethren, another and a nobler order is opened to us all, by the goodness of our God. It is nothing impracticable, absurd, impossible, deceptive, perishable. No; many have already attained it; many more are yet to attain it, — perhaps all in that brighter age which is just at hand. I mean that true greatness, which holy disinterested love will confer upon you in the esteem of God and all good beings. I mean that true greatness which was exemplified by the meekest and loveliest One that ever trod this earth; and by him urged upon all his followers: Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Do you say that you feel nothing of such an ambition, — that if this be all the elevation we offer you, you are content to be a Christian of a less lofty standard? Craven spirit! Is it true or false humility, that is content to be little here, — that loves low degrees of excellence, — that shrinks from the bright example of the Saviour, — that would debase the standard of Christian duty, — that would in effect deny an obligation expressly enjoined in the word of God, and indispensable to any great advancement of his cause on earth? For what great object was ever accomplished under heaven, without great risks, sacrifices, and exertions? Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Yes; hear it Christians; let unbelief, under the imposing

names of philosophy or prudence, say what it will, — let corrupt nature within our own hearts, with its thousand soft and specious tongues, plead the contrary as strongly as it may, — it is still an everlasting truth, that Christian love is not selfish. The character which our Bible gives of charity is, that she seeketh not her own; and if that charity reign not in our bosoms, whatever in the sight of men may be our pretensions to the Christian name, in the purer eyes of him who looketh on the heart, we are nothing.

"Nor tongues, nor faith, nor fiery zeal, The work of love can e'er fulfill."

Having now finished the illustration of the great principle of the text, — the principle of Christian benevolence, as opposed to selfishness, — permit two or three words by way of application:

1. This subject is profitable for reproof.

The human heart is a world of passions. But if the love of doing good do not predominate over every desire of personal enjoyment, certain it is that there is something wrong within, — something very unlike Jesus Christ. For be it so, that personal enjoyment in some form or other, is the summit of desire with unregenerate men, — conceding that with such their own worldly, or possibly on self-righteous principles, their future happiness is systematically regarded as their being's end and aim, — is it, therefore, such with those who have been renewed after the image of the God of love, in whom old things have passed away, and all things have become new? How then could the apostle John (as he does) make that love which seeketh not her own, the decisive evidence of regeneration? Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

If then, brethren, the possession of this love and its prevalence within us, be the sole criterion of genuine piety, —and if all in whom it reigns, feel it more blessed to give than to receive, — let us carefully cultivate, and habitually exercise it, — or let us cease to call ourselves Christians. What does our baptism amount to, if we are not baptized into this spirit? Why should the temper of Belial reign in the church of Christ? If any man defile the temple of God, says St. Paul, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy; which temple ye are. Who will dare then to pollute it with covetousness? Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

2. This subject is profitable for correction.

If the spirit of benevolence be so essential to Christianity, how comes it to pass that in daily practice, we are no more under its blight and cheering influence? Evidently, in part, my brethren, because we are influenced so much by the old habit of thinking and acting like the rest of the world, who have their portion in this life. And still more, because after all that God has done for us and in us, there yet remain so many of the poisonous dregs of selfishness at the bottom of our hearts, — sometimes swelling and scorching our bosoms with pride, anger and envy, — sometimes kindling them fiercely with sensual desires, — sometimes chilling them with avarice, aversion, or fear, — sometimes petrifying them into a profound indifference to the claims, wants, and woes of our perishing fellow-men. It is but here and there, you find a Christian's spirit in a healthy and vigorous state. It is but here and there, you find a Christian church in a flourishing and prosperous condition. The family, the neighborhood, the nation, are not what they should be, and might be. Complaints abound in every

circle; some complaining of others; some, though fewer, of themselves. All feel the disorder of society; but few seem to know the cause, and fewer still, the remedy. Almost all of us have yet to learn what that meaneth: It is more blessed to give, than to receive. This is the sole remedy, the true catholicon, the sovereign panacea.

Finally. This subject is profitable for instruction in righteousness.

Understand and remember the words of the Lord Jesus. The highest happiness you can feel as social beings, is connected with the discharge of your highest social duty;— it is inseparable from humble, voluntary, self-denying efforts to do good. The best condition you could be in on earth, is not that of receiving, but of communicating benefits. Such is the Christian theory of social happiness.

Do not imagine, my dear brethren, that it is merely a beautiful theory, — to be admired in the abstract, but as a principle of conduct more fit for angels than for men. I admit that it is fit for angels; and that in every one of those holy beings who are sent forth to minister for the heirs of salvation, it is unceasingly and brightly exemplified. But I must deny that it is fit for them only. On the contrary, I affirm that it is as proper for men as for angels; and that the will of God will never be done on earth as it is in heaven, till this principle becomes the ruling principle of all human conduct. Far from being restricted in its application to the rich, it is as a practical principle specially adapted to the condition of the poor. It allows no class to live solely on the labor of others; but commands all to contribute liberally by their own labors, either of body or mind, to the common good. It is a principle binding on every Christian, male and female, old and young, in every condition of life, at all times, and in all circumstances. It is a principle absolutely indispensable to the happiness of every human society; universally true; universally applicable; universally binding; for (as the apostle James testifies,) to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

I repeat it, that you may never forget it. This is the fundamental principle on which all the business of human life should be transacted. Christian benevolence, not selfishness, should rule the world. It should govern every family, every church, every community, and State, and nation. It would calm domestic discord in a moment; heal all the wounds of Zion; close the war in Mexico, and foreclose war with England. It should govern every ruler and every citizen; every master and every servant; every parent and every child; every minister and every member of the church. It should exert a controlling influence over all our reading, all our thinking, all our studies, all our conversation, all our prayers, all our deportment, all our amusements, all our employments. Not a plan ought to be contrived; not a contract made; not an article bought or sold; not a gift bestowed or received; not a cent earned, laid up, or expended; but with our Saviour's all-comprehensive maxim before our eyes, or at least warming and guiding every pulsation of our hearts: It is more blessed to give, than to receive. On this principle every church should be constituted; every house of worship erected; every minister settled; every deacon ordained; every member admitted; every duty discharged; — nor should any one think of joining a church, much less of becoming a pastor, without remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, and resolving, through divine grace, to contribute all in his power to the common good, whatever be the conduct of others toward him. In this generous spirit, Paul said to the Corinthians, I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

My brethren, my dear brethren, this is the generous spirit the whole church needs to day. The whole world needs it. Till it comes into exercise there is no hope. Through no other agency will God work salvation in the earth. We have tried other methods, and proved them vain. Let us now try this method of the Lord Jesus. It has in it inexhaustible energies, inexhaustible resources. It will open new views; it will breathe fresh hopes; it will devise and execute the most noble and liberal things. It is a common saying, that necessity is the mother of invention. My brethren, necessity is here. Look around you and see how much must be done, and ought to be done, for the temporal and eternal happiness of our fellow-men, or they must come short of the best good of both earth and heaven: and then tell me if I do not speak the truth when I say, necessity is here, — the keenest, the deepest, the most distressing, that ever touched and pierced the soul, — the everlasting, the awful necessity, which moved the Son of God from his heavenly throne, to become the Saviour of lost men. O hear in your touched hearts to-day, the speechless cry of that necessity, and let it stir up all your love! It calls you this day to multiply your efforts, your offerings, and your prayers, to save souls from death, — souls now within your reach, — tomorrow, perhaps, in eternity, — perhaps in that place of torment, where no prayers, no tears, no efforts, can possibly avail. Listen! listen! Do you comprehend it now? It is a call to save souls from death! But it is more. It summons you forth to win for your Saviour a seed to serve him, — for yourselves, companions in your march to glory, — for heaven, partakers of its immortal bliss, — for earth, a new race of regenerated sons, who shall build up the waste places of many generations, and make her wilderness as Eden, her desert as the garden of the Lord. O turn not away from the thrilling, glorious, pressing call! It is a call to multiply your own happiness, in seeking that of others. As the Lord is true, it will multiply it an hundred fold! Fear not to embark your all in this glorious enterprise, — when God himself goes before you, and holy angels attend you, and the good of earth will follow you, and success is certain, and the reward is sure. Fear not to devise liberal things in a cause like this, for by liberal things you shall stand. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus how he said: It is more blessed to give, than to receive.

Messengers of the churches, ministers of Christ, beloved and honored brethren, suffer the word of exhortation. Permit me to remind you of our present privileges, in this Association. What precious opportunities of usefulness are here! Are we all properly awake to them? All may do good here; by your Christian spirit and deportment; by your counsels and your prayers; by your enlarged sympathies, and devices of liberality; by your generous resolutions and contributions; by kind words fitly spoken, — like apples of gold in pictures of silver, — in the pulpit, and in the pew, — in the house, and by the way. Let every spirit rise to meet the occasion! Let every bosom swell with the vital tide of charity! Let every heart breathe forth perpetual silent prayer to heaven, for direction and aid! Let every mind be fixed to seize the winged moments of irrecoverable opportunity! Nor let the heavenly ardor be limited to age or sex. O let it be said of every individual here to-day, as it was said of the grateful Mary, when she poured the precious ointment of delicious odors on her Saviour's head : She hath done what she could! Then, in a different indeed, but still nobler sense, shall the whole atmosphere be filled with the odor of the ointment, and its sweet fragrance rise upward to refresh the spirits of the just made perfect, the innumerable company of angels, and the throne of God. May God add his blessing. Amen.